

Submission to the Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and  
Other Non-Government Organizations.

I am writing this submission as a concerned lay member of the Catholic Church. My submission relates to only a few broad issues, and in doing so I would request that the Committee of Inquiry give consideration to addressing them with Church representatives who appear before it.

Current Policies, Protocols and Frameworks.

1. The Catholic Church in Victoria has two systems for handling abuse allegations. The Melbourne Archdiocese has its own system, The Melbourne Response, and the other three Dioceses in Victoria utilize another program that is used across Australia, Towards Healing. While I understand The Melbourne Response draws on Towards Healing, and there are overlaps, I would submit there is no justification for the Melbourne Archdiocese having its own system. To the contrary, I believe there are good reasons for having the same program in Melbourne that is being used elsewhere in Victoria and across Australia. In particular, I believe it is in the interests of people approaching the Catholic Church for assistance in relation to allegations of abuse to have a unified service available in this State.
2. Both Towards Healing and The Melbourne Response have documents about their programs on their websites, and these set out principles, policies, and procedures relating to complaints about sexual and other types of abuse. However, while the Towards Healing documentation is detailed, the Melbourne Response documentation is so limited that it is difficult for the general public to obtain an understanding of how it operates. I would submit that this is unacceptable.
3. I believe it is important to point out that an unsatisfactory aspect of both these documents is that they do not distinguish between the handling of:
  - complaints being made by adults about what they allege happened to them either as adults or as children;
  - complaints relating to the behavior of adults towards children.I would suggest it is essential that these two groups are handled differently, and that this should be set out in program documentation. That this is not evident in the current documentation that is publicly available raises questions about how well complaints relating to the behavior of adults towards children are being handled. I would submit that the Committee should examine this.
4. I understand that both programs are clear that when there are serious abuse allegations concerning children mandatory reporting procedures should be followed and the programs should not be involved until an investigation has been completed. However the documents set out on the websites for both programs also indicate that children may be formally interviewed in other circumstances, but it is not made clear what these circumstances might be. This is linked with the paucity of programmatic material in relation to children, and so in effect there seems to be no clearly enunciated program for children. I would suggest that the Pavlou case, which was handled by The Melbourne Response and had some most unfortunate outcomes, is an example of why this is needed.

### Accountability Mechanisms

1. While there are indications of some form of internal accountability for both programs, neither program formally accounts to the Catholic community or the general community for what is happening. I believe this is demonstrated by the following.
  - There is no formal, external reporting process that either program undertakes on a regular basis, e.g. annually, that provides information such as statistics about the people who have participated, complaints the programs have addressed, the services people have received, and payments made by way of compensation or reparation. In saying this I am distinguishing between the occasional public comments that have been made about the programs by Church officials and a formal reporting process.
  - Neither of the programs has been independently evaluated in relation to levels of satisfaction and outcomes. Public comments made by Church officials that people are satisfied with the service they have received, have been contradicted by people who have said they were most unhappy with what occurred to them. In the absence of an independent evaluation it is not known how successful the programs are, and there is no reason why this can't be done while also respecting people's need for privacy. In making these comments I wish to distinguish between "reviews" that have been undertaken in the past and an evaluation that focuses on the recipients of the service.

In summary, I believe there is extremely limited information about what is happening in these programs. In my view this is most unsatisfactory because they are answerable for the service they are providing to the Catholic community and the general public. I would submit that both programs should be required to provide a formal annual report and both should be strongly encouraged to have an independent evaluation done in terms outlined above.

2. A further issue in regard to accountability is that abuse allegations aired in the media indicate that members of religious orders have committed offences as well as diocesan clergy. I would submit it is therefore essential that the Committee examine accountability issues relating to both these groups.
3. Finally, there is an accountability issue in relation to the funding of these programs. It is claimed by Broken Rites that both programs are funded by Catholic Church Insurance Limited (CCI), but to my knowledge this has not been confirmed or denied by Catholic Church authorities. All that has been said publicly is that the programs are funded by the Catholic Church but are independent. I would submit there are good reasons for the Committee to be informed about the source of the funding of these programs, with the most important of these reasons being that this will enable a judgment to be made about the extent to which they are independent and the extent to which there may be conflicts of interest.

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